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Culture of peace

Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General hereby transmits the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in accordance with General Assembly resolution 58/128 of 19 December 2003.

Summary

The present report, prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), is submitted in accordance with General Assembly resolution 58/128 of 19 December 2003, entitled "Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation". The document focuses on three topics: (i) the use of education as a means of promoting sustainable tolerance and peace; (ii) an overview of the activities designed to promote interreligious dialogue; and (iii) the implementation of activities in support of the dialogue among civilizations, which has become a principal focus of the Organization's efforts.

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I. Introduction

1. Underlining the importance of promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among human beings in all their diversity of religion, belief, culture and language, and affirming that interreligious dialogue is an integral part of efforts to translate shared values into actions, in particular efforts to promote a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations, the General Assembly, by its resolution 58/128, acknowledged that respect for the diversity of religions and cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation can contribute to combating ideologies and practices based on discrimination, intolerance and hatred and help reinforce world peace, social justice and friendship among peoples. Based on these considerations, the Assembly encouraged and urged Governments and States to take a number of measures aimed at, inter alia, promoting, including through education, understanding, tolerance and friendship among human beings in their diversity of religion, belief, culture and language; protecting religious sites and preventing acts or threats of damage to and destruction of these sites; preventing and eliminating discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief, in the recognition, exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms in all fields of civil, economic, political, social and cultural life; and ensuring that, in the course of their official duties, members of law enforcement bodies and the military, civil servants, educators and other public officials respect different religions and beliefs and do not discriminate against persons professing them.

2. The United Nations Millennium Declaration also highlighted the importance of tolerance, which it considered one of the fundamental values essential to international relations in the twenty-first century and which should include the active promotion of a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations, with human beings respecting one another in all their diversity of belief, culture and language, neither fearing nor repressing differences within or between societies, but rather cherishing them as a precious asset of humanity.

3. The report aims at providing insight into UNESCO activities related to promoting religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation. It is divided into three parts that depict three different approaches to the promotion of cultural and religious understanding. The first part of the document is a snapshot of concrete activities and projects implemented by one sector of UNESCO. The second part of the document deals with the overarching theme of the dialogue among civilizations and cultures, which by a decision of the General Conference, has become a principal focus of the Organization's efforts. This important effort aims at promoting and intensifying the dialogue among cultures and civilizations, emphasizing concrete and practical action, mainly through important international conferences and at the regional and subregional levels. Finally, the third part of the document details the variety of recent activities related to an ongoing, almost decade-long, increasingly multidisciplinary project.

II. Education as a means of promoting religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation

4. The UNESCO commitment to the promotion of religious and cultural understanding and harmony through education is expressed at several levels, through its operational projects and advocacy, networking, research and public-awareness activities.

A. Operational projects

5. Operational activities cover a wide range of areas, helping countries to mainstream mutual and intercultural understanding, integrating a culture of peace values into their national education systems. This is undertaken through teacher-training and the production of educational materials within the framework of education for human rights and culture of peace, as well as by supporting textbooks and school curricula revision. In all of these activities, key emphasis is placed on support for local communities, associations and networks, with specific actions underpinning them. Following are examples of UNESCO operational activities.

Development of textbooks and other learning materials

6. Recent activities in the development of textbooks and other learning materials have focused on cultivating learning societies in which peace, human rights and tolerance are at the core of the curriculum. Since the international experts meeting on textbooks and learning materials (December 2002), several key actions have been launched, including three joint research studies on textbook analysis and revision completed in Israel and Palestine. Following the successful delivery of nearly nine million revised textbooks in response to the emergency situation in Iraq, the activities of the textbook quality improvement programme continue to focus on the development of textbooks and other learning materials from a peace and human rights perspective. The global strategy for textbooks currently under development seeks to establish, in consultation with Member States, a set of standard-setting instruments from which concrete recommendations for Governments, publishers and educators at all levels can be derived. The ultimate aim is to build national capacity for the sustainable development of high quality textbooks and other learning materials that incorporate universally shared values, as seen through local lenses, in ways that promote a worldwide culture of tolerance and peace.

Training on mediation in Hungary

7. Within the context of its educational activities on conflict resolution and the pilot project on mediation in Hungary, following the 2002 needs assessment mission, UNESCO organized a training workshop from 8-12 March 2004, in the cities of Budapest and Kazincbarcika. Organized in collaboration with the Hungarian authorities and the UNESCO National Commission, this workshop aimed to train educational partners on mediation skills for the integration of Roma children into the Hungarian school system. Thirty decision makers, teachers, educators, mediators, social workers and practitioners took part in the event. The successful mission has played an important role in the establishment of a new institution in

Budapest — "Service of mediation in education" — under the aegis of the Ministry of Education.

B. Advocacy, networking and research

Guidelines on intercultural education

8. UNESCO is currently developing a position paper on one of the central issues of current international concerns — the need for education to respect and reflect cultural diversity and to contribute to intercultural understanding and cooperation. This document on education in a multicultural world aims to present the basic guiding principles of intercultural education with the objective of making the UNESCO position clear and to give it wider dissemination. It will clarify some of the key concepts and issues that surround the international debate, resume in a synthetic form the international standard-setting instruments that refer to intercultural education and present a set of practical guidelines on it to guide Member States in developing educational policies in multicultural contexts.

C. Public-awareness activities

Publications on education for peace and conflict resolution

9. UNESCO contributes to the promotion of cultural understanding through several publications and pedagogical manuals for teachers and educators, such as *Best practices on non-violent conflict resolution in and out of school* and the guide *The art of living in peace*, which particularly aims at reaffirming ideals of peace while working to promote harmony between nations.

Publications to promote mother tongue and national/local languages

10. The main activity in the field of language and education that contributes to a culture of peace pertains to the promotion of mother tongue teaching and learning and, over the long term, multilingual education. In particular, the education sector has developed and distributed materials to promote mother tongue and national/local languages and has published documents on indigenous peoples' education and linguistic and biocultural diversity, notably *Sharing a world of difference: the earth's linguistic, cultural and biological diversity* and *Map the world's biocultural diversity: people, languages and ecosystems*. Guidelines on intercultural education were also produced.

11. Secondary education (general, technical and vocational) actions implemented by UNESCO emphasize values on education, dialogue between different cultures, tolerance and gender equity. In particular, international conferences on secondary education, as well as the implementation of the normative instrument, the "Revised recommendation concerning technical and vocational education", emphasize these aspects of education. Furthermore, all resource material developed by UNESCO features images of multiple ethnic groups; (for example the resource kit on science and technology education).

Meeting on education and indigenous peoples

12. An international meeting on education and indigenous peoples was held at UNESCO headquarters (17 November 2003) as part of UNESCO activities aimed at promoting peace and international understanding. Keynote presentations at the November debate included ones by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms of indigenous peoples and the President of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, who spoke to the issues and challenges facing indigenous education and to the achievement of quality universal education.

III. Implementation of activities related to the dialogue among civilizations and cultures

13. Further to UNESCO General Conference resolution 39 (20 October 2001), and to the important role conferred upon UNESCO by the Global agenda for dialogue among civilizations, adopted by the General Assembly in resolution 56/6, the organization has intensified its overall action in the area of dialogue among civilizations and cultures.

14. The concept of a dialogue among civilizations has assumed even greater salience in the face of new and multidimensional threats to global peace and security. Action to promote dialogue has attracted renewed attention at the highest political levels throughout the world. The challenge today is to move beyond general agreement about the value of — or the need for — dialogue to concrete approaches and perspectives.

15. Recognizing the need to address a complex range of socio-political issues and parameters, the UNESCO General Conference adopted landmark resolution 47 (16 October 2003), setting out new perspectives on and concrete action for the organization's work in the area of dialogue among cultures and civilizations. Drawing on two key events — the international ministerial conference entitled "Dialogue among civilizations — the quest for new perspectives", held in New Delhi on 9 and 10 July 2003, and "The regional forum on the dialogue among civilizations", held in Ohrid, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, on 29 and 30 August 2003, General Conference resolution 47 affirmed that tolerance, mutual understanding, respect for diversity, respect for the other, human rights and democratic principles are core values underlying any meaningful dialogue, and underlined the need to address and overcome ignorance and prejudice about the ways and customs of peoples.

16. Resolution 47 further affirmed that respect for the diversity of cultures, including the protection and the promotion of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, values of tolerance and mutual understanding are fostered through multi-civilization discourse and are the best guarantors of peace in the world. The resolution also reaffirmed that acts of terrorism represent an attack against humankind, are strongly rejected by all religions and contravene the values of all civilizations. It emphasized that a commitment to dialogue among civilizations and cultures also represents a commitment against terrorism.

17. Recognizing the need to translate agreed principles and agreements that inspire a dialogue among civilizations and cultures into concrete activities and action

throughout UNESCO programmes, the resolution considered that UNESCO should henceforth be guided in its action by the framework provided by the "New Delhi Declaration on the dialogue among civilizations — quest for new perspectives" and should emphasize the pursuit of concrete activities in the following areas: (i) education, especially through the pursuit of the six "Education for all" goals and efforts to promote quality education; (ii) the sciences and technology, including the role of traditional and local knowledge systems; (iii) cultural diversity in all its dimensions, including world heritage; and (iv) the media and information, and communication technologies.

18. By adopting the "Sana'a call for dialogue among cultures and civilizations", the international symposium held in Sana'a, Yemen, 10 and 11 February 2004, reaffirmed that, in building a sustainable future, dialogue is instrumental everywhere and that new approaches, through concrete action, will be required for education, the sciences, cultural diversity, the media and information and communication technologies, particularly at the regional and subregional levels.

19. The Issyk-Kul Declaration, adopted in Issyk-Kul, Kyrgyzstan, on 11 June 2004, by the international conference "Eurasia in the 21st century — dialogue of cultures or conflict of civilizations?", applauded the collective commitment expressed by all leaders participating in the conference to dialogue, good governance, sustainable development and cultural diversity. The Declaration enjoined all peoples and countries of Eurasia, their youth and political decision makers to engage in and practice dialogue aimed at building and strengthening mutual understanding, trust, respect for the other and cultural diversity, democratic practices and cooperation, with the aim of securing peace, development and prosperity throughout the region.

IV. Programme of action on interreligious dialogue

20. The interreligious dialogue programme, mandated by the UNESCO General Conference at its twenty-sixth session, under its "Roads of faith" project, and modelled after the successful "Silk Roads Projects", was launched in Morocco in 1995. The main objective of the interreligious dialogue programme, considered a relevant dimension of the dialogue among civilizations and cultures, is to promote dialogue between religions and spiritual traditions around the world, in particular in areas fraught by inter- or intra-religious conflicts resulting from mistrust, misunderstanding or ignorance of spiritual traditions and their specific cultures and practices. Hence, the Programme stresses past and present interaction and cross-cultural exchanges among these spiritual traditions, as well as the need to foster reciprocal knowledge between them, to achieve respect for pluralism, beliefs and convictions, the basis for harmony in multicultural and plurireligious societies.

21. This programme has gained fresh impetus since the tragic events of 11 September 2001, when the world recognized the need for a better understanding of religions and their beliefs and practices, in a neutral and objective manner, with a view to promoting dialogue in all spheres, involving religious leaders and their communities, academic experts on religions in all disciplines and civil society as a whole. Since other dramatic events have followed, it is more necessary now than ever not only to strengthen intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the political arena, but also to raise awareness within civil society, particularly among people

prone to fanaticism and extremism due largely to ignorance and prejudice. A more holistic view should be encouraged whereby religion is regarded not only as a set of dogmas and beliefs or as cosmogony, but whereby it also has a special link with human rights (the right to express one's conviction and belief or the right of not to believe), ethics and other social issues, concepts and values. Likewise, the knowledge gathered from studying religions should foster understanding and protection of cultural heritage, both tangible and intangible.

22. Many activities have been undertaken within the context of the UNESCO interreligious dialogue programme to promote reciprocal knowledge and understanding among cultures and religions, stressing mutual respect and recognition, going beyond the concept of tolerance.

A. Regional and geo-strategic coverage

23. The regional and geo-strategic coverage of the interreligious dialogue is paramount, since each cluster of countries might share common problems. UNESCO organized several important meetings at the regional level, such as in Central Asia (Bishkek in 1999, Tashkent in 2000 and Almaty in 2002) and in North Africa and the Mediterranean region (Rabat in 1995 and Malta in 1997). The last one in the series took place in Abuja, covering all of West Africa, a very sensitive region. It allowed for discussion on conflict resolution, the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the role that religious community leaders may play in easing tensions. A declaration, available in English and French, was adopted, and the proceedings are in the process of being finalized. The next meeting, to focus on religions in peace and conflict, where one of the topics will deal with terrorism issues, will take place in Sydney, Australia (November 2004), and will involve participants from the Asia-Pacific area.

B. Education

24. With the purpose of strengthening religious and cultural understanding in order to attain harmony and peaceful coexistence, UNESCO has established 13 Chairs on comparative studies of religions and their specific culture, interreligious and intercultural dialogue in centres of academic excellence in almost all continents. They will be brought together in a formal network — UNITWIN — with the aim of building a common programme of research and learning and to facilitate teacher and student exchange. These Chairs are also specialized in intercultural and interreligious mediation and in training trainers of future school teachers. Likewise, in follow-up to an international survey carried out by UNESCO on teaching intercultural and interreligious dialogue, UNESCO, with other partners, will design and produce manuals or pedagogical tools for a better understanding among young people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. A meeting scheduled to take place in Oslo (2-5 September 2004) will identify the best practices in this field and the focal points of each region, with the aim of examining the role of education in overcoming stereotyped images of the other, obstacles to dialogue and interdisciplinary approaches to overcoming these barriers.

C. Media and communication

25. A year-long academic course was conducted in Geneva (Faculté des lettres — Histoire des religions) that brought together journalists and specialists from all fields of religious studies. The course was aimed at giving future journalists deeper knowledge of religions in their cultural and international context, with a view to combating stereotypes and amalgams in the print media and the information and communication technologies.

26. A meeting of Israeli and Palestinian media professionals took place at UNESCO in December 2003. Following a very intense but frank and professional discussion, the journalists themselves drew up a list of practical follow-up actions to be carried out. Reporters on both sides promised to strive to avoid stereotyping each other as aggressors and to give in their respective media a more humanized picture of the conflict and the two peoples, for instance by naming civilian victims of war and terrorist activities on both sides. They also agreed to actively seek stories that would reveal another dimension of the other side, notably by reporting on cultural or religious events, and health care (organ-exchange) and educational collaboration. The main objective is for each side to get beyond a stigmatized image of the other side. The participants also agreed to establish through UNESCO an electronic dialogue forum designed to advance concrete professional discussions.

D. Human rights

27. It is of the utmost importance to raise awareness among populations, countries and individuals about the right of conviction, which includes the right to believe or not to believe and to express freely one's opinions and convictions without being persecuted for exercising that right. In that connection, the interreligious programme has organized seminars on themes such as "Human rights and freedom of religions: practices in western Europe" (proceedings available), and it will organize another such meeting targeting eastern Europe. The organization will also organize a meeting on the space of religions in a context of laity and citizenship.

E. Conflict resolution

28. The meetings organized in the framework of the interreligious programme aim to restore trust among communities belonging to different cultures and spiritual traditions, and hence to prevent and resolve open tensions and conflicts. A meeting will be held at UNESCO headquarters on reconstruction and reconciliation through intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Special attention will be given to the Middle East by bringing together grass-roots representatives from Palestine and Israel, in order for them to build confidence and to seek common microactivities in community work, such as common schools for children, the twinning of towns, common curricula, leisure, and so forth. Another meeting, to be held in Sydney, Australia, will be on religions in peace and conflict. The Libreville Colloquium should also be mentioned, as a panel was organized for it on the role of traditional spiritual leaders in the prevention and the resolution of conflicts. The Libreville Declaration is also available.

F. Sciences and religion

29. Ethics, bioethics, biogenetics, astrophysics and new scientific technologies related to the human being and the universe are undergoing great transformation. Ethical values stemming from religious systems offer a distinct view on these topics, which also have to be legally framed in order to maintain human dignity while allowing research. In the framework of the interreligious dialogue programme, a seminar on science and spirituality gathered outstanding researchers from various scientific fields and religious, humanistic and atheistic personalities who discussed the theme in Almaty (Kazakhstan) in September 2001.

G. Cultural heritage

Doha statement of the international symposium of ulama on Islam and cultural heritage

30. Following the destruction of the Buddha statues of Bamiyan, UNESCO took action to try to avert future cultural disasters of this type. An international conference of ulama, Islamic religious leaders, was organized in December 2001, to examine the position of the Muslim world towards the preservation of Islamic and non-Islamic heritage. This conference, jointly organized with the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, resulted in a clear declaration of principles that can be appealed to in the future.

UNESCO Declaration concerning the intentional destruction of cultural heritage

31. At its thirty-second session, the UNESCO General Conference unanimously adopted the UNESCO Declaration concerning the intentional destruction of cultural heritage. This Declaration reaffirms the international community's commitment to fight intentional destruction of cultural heritage in all its forms so that such cultural heritage may be transmitted to succeeding generations. All aspects of intentional destruction are covered — in times of peace, occupation and armed conflict — and States are called upon to fight it with various measures, such as legislative, technical, administrative or others, and by adhering to international agreements on the protection of cultural heritage.

32. The most important provisions of the Declaration relate to issues of State responsibility and individual criminal responsibility. In particular, the former provides for — if and to the extent provided for by international law — State responsibility for the intentional destruction of cultural heritage if the State concerned either intentionally destroys cultural heritage, or intentionally fails to act to prevent such destruction. The latter underscores the need for States to establish their jurisdiction over, and to provide for effective sanctions against, persons who have committed or have ordered acts of intentional destruction. The scope of application of these two provisions differs from the other provisions in the Declaration in that they concern only cultural heritage of great importance for humanity. When applying the Declaration, States should respect international humanitarian law and international rules related to human rights.

V. Conclusions and recommendations

33. **A particularly important dimension of the dialogue among civilizations is interreligious dialogue, which implies dialogue both among religions and within a single religion. Indeed, the key issue raised by the dialogue among civilizations is the place of ethics in the relationship between societies, peoples and individuals. Hence, interreligious dialogue constitutes an essential dimension of the dialogue among civilizations. Many interreligious conflicts are fuelled largely by a search for identity expressed by a retreat into a particular religion or spiritual tradition to the exclusion of all others. Beyond the political factors at work, these antagonistic manifestations or retreats are rooted in ignorance of the intrinsic ideals and objectives shared by all faiths. Interreligious dialogue could be an important factor in highlighting the dynamic interplay between spiritual traditions and their specific cultures, by focusing on their mutual contributions and exchanges. It is therefore even more imperative in this age of globalization for all faiths to work together through joint action to reinvent forms of coexistence for the peoples of the world whose experience of conflict or coexistence constitutes the building blocks of the collective memory of humanity.**

34. **In keeping with its ethical and intellectual mandate, and working in close cooperation with the United Nations Organization, other relevant organizations of the system, NGOs and other civil society components, particularly academia, UNESCO will spare no effort in enhancing implementation of General Assembly resolution 58/128, notably through its own programme on interrreligious dialogue, considered a dimension of intercultural dialogue. In this context, greater synergy will be sought with a number of partners from within and outside the United Nations system who will address similar problems or issues. This includes, but is not limited to, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the European Council, the European Parliament and the European Commission, and intellectual organizations. Given the prominent place of religious issues on the political, social, cultural and scientific agendas of our contemporary world, it is imperative that such a programme be strengthened and pursued in a manner that will provide an enabling environment for international understanding and will contribute to a sustainable culture of peace and non-violence.**

35. **In this context, world religions and beliefs could contribute tremendously to the promotion of a culture of peace if they resolve to, on the one hand, collectively face the problems confronting the world today, such as terrorism and sectarian violence, while, on the other hand, practice tolerance within their respective religious communities and in their inter-faith relations. It is however evident that, notwithstanding important progress in achieving religious tolerance in the world, religious intolerance still persists and constitutes a serious threat to peace and social cohesion. It is therefore of vital importance that the international community encourage interreligious organizations and movements working for peace to engage in more active dialogue and cooperation, with a view to enhancing the values of pluralism. The United Nations and the relevant bodies and organizations of the system, notably UNESCO and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, should seek to coordinate their ongoing and future efforts in enhancing**

inter-faith dialogue aimed at highlighting the common heritage of universal values and at counteracting the "hijacking" of religious values for use as a pretext to justify violence, terrorism or exclusion. In this endeavour, emphasis should be placed on concrete and practical action in the domains of education, the sciences, culture and communication. Harmony and tolerance should be promoted through common activities of the United Nations system, involving not only decision makers and religious leaders, but also civil society as a whole, with special attention being paid to marginalized fragile populations. Educational programmes and the production of pedagogical materials should be implemented according to the needs of country clusters and regions, to teach tolerance and recognition respectful of the world's spiritual and cultural diversity. The UNESCO Chairs of the UNITWIN programme on intercultural and interreligious dialogue should be strengthened, as an important tool to guarantee a more objective understanding of religions and their specific cultural and societal values, free of stereotypes and prejudice, to facilitate interreligious mediation in the region where an institution is established. The United Nations University could play an important role in reinforcing this important programme. Local associations and initiatives dealing with intercultural and interreligious mediation, especially in difficult neighbourhoods or towns with a varied population belonging to different cultural, linguistic and confessional backgrounds should be enhanced and should pay particular attention to youth. Likewise, specialized NGOs and local associations should be encouraged to promote the peaceful and harmonious coexistence of communities belonging to different confessions, cultures, languages, ways of life (sedentary and nomadic rural and urban, etc.) and ethnic backgrounds. Traditional spiritualities, in particular the autochthonous ones and those in danger of disappearing because of war, persecution and forced migration, should be inventoried and protected. Associations and initiatives should also seek to protect the fundamental human right of freedom of expression and convictions — the right to believe or not to believe — and should teach it as widely as possible through curricula designed to this end or through informal education, using audio-visual equipment, new technologies and traditional know-how. They should also implement the recommendations or proposals adopted by the congresses, colloquia or any seminar on interreligious dialogue organized by UNESCO.